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MINISTERIAL UPDATE AND FUTURE CHALLENGES - ON THE ROAD
TO A CONSERVER SOCIETY

by
The Honourable Ruth Grier, Ontario Minister
of the Environment

Good morning: It is a pleasure to be here today as we start the 38th annual Ontario Waste Management Conference.

In one form or another, this conference has served as the launching point for a wide range of pollution control initiatives in Ontario over the past 38 years. The people attending have contributed in many ways to resolving the environmental issues raised here.

The agenda today covers a wide range of issues. The speakers have a lot of ideas and insight to offer. Each of us attending this year is involved in our own way in restoring and protecting our environment.

There is so much to do! This morning, I want to set out for you some of the guideposts I see that can lead us on the road to change from a consumer to a conserver society -- a road down which we have started, but have much further to travel.

I want to review some of the assumptions under which we have operated and how they are changing, some of our achievements, new priorities and initiatives, and basic principles under which a workable conserver society can be established.

Changing assumptions

Conserving is a significant change in direction for this society. When the first Europeans settled on this continent, they started what seemed like unlimited economic growth. For more than four centuries we built a society whose prosperity was based on resource extraction, efficient production, distribution and consumption, and waste disposal.

We competed to see who could run fastest through this process of extraction, production, use and waste.

With this prosperity came some basic assumptions:

- New is better than used.
- If we throw it away it is garbage.
- The faster we produce, consume and discard, the more prosperous our lives will be.

We have since discovered:

- That new is not better than used if we run low on new material and can not get rid of the old.
- That what we discard stays to contaminate our air and water and use up our land, and
- That accelerated consumption simply uses up our resources faster.

Socially and economically, we have been living off our capital, depleting both our resources and our environment. We have all come to realize now that we must at the same time compete and co-operate in a new social investment strategy that will sustain the quality of our

lives without depleting our environmental or resource capital.

That strategy is inherent in a conserver society and I think we have already taken our first steps down that road. More and more, we are turning away from the concept of simply waste management and thinking instead of the efficient use of the material resources that we enjoy in this province.

As we ended the 1980s, Canadians generated 1.7 kilograms of municipal solid waste per person per day, with the United States and Australia trailing close on our heels, according to the federal government's State of the Environment Report. In the Greater Toronto Area, we produced three kilograms per person, almost double the national world record.

The bright side to this is that the total waste tonnage disposed of in Metro landfills in 1990 was actually reduced by 3.3 per cent from 1989. We want to see more waste reduction -- much more -- but we have definitely seen a turning point, a point that begins to shut the door on the consumer society of the 1980s.

Achievements

Our greatest gains, so far, have been in recycling through the Blue Box Program. Last year's Ministry of the Environment assistance grants, by the end of March, 1991, had helped establish 179 municipal recycling projects serving more than 410 municipalities. We estimate that the projects are diverting 340,000 tonnes of material from disposal.

Blue box recycling in Metro Toronto is currently diverting 75,000 tonnes of single family residential waste and the region has started to bring recycling to apartment dwellers. The region has also eliminated 38,000 tonnes of waste through municipal composting of leaves and yard waste and started an ambitious program for home composting.

The ministry has provided close to \$7.5 million in assistance to Ontario municipalities to get

300,000 home composters in people's backyards. I am sure that continuing promotion will encourage even more public interest in this type of waste reduction.

We have set aside \$43 million this year to help with municipal capital and operating costs in blue box projects and more than \$12 million to expand the use of home composters.

Our municipalities are showing a lot of enthusiasm and creativity in developing the potential of the blue box.

- In Trenton, Quinte Region Recycling is recovering old corrugated cardboard, boxboard and rigid plastic in addition to the normal range of blue box materials.
- Peterborough is doing pilot studies in effective fine paper recovery and in the feasibility of recovering plastic film, such as grocery bags and food wrap, through the blue box.
- Scarborough is testing a dome-type igloo container for bulk collection of recyclables from 48 multi-residential buildings in their city and East York.
- Ottawa is working with local charities in recovering used clothing, with some recovered for sale in a local Thrift Store and the balance baled and sold through brokers.
- In the township of Archipelago on Georgian Bay, a barge is collecting "white goods", in an attempt to retrieve, repair and reuse every old refrigerator, freezer, washer, dryer and stove to keep them out of disposal sites.

The list goes on.

We are not standing still in our industrial waste diversion program either. We have

committed \$51 million to 280 separate projects by industries, businesses and institutions. This has the potential for diverting more than 1.2 million tonnes of useful material from disposal.

They are recovering chlorofluorocarbons that would otherwise thin the Earth's ozone layer, toxic chemicals, corrosives and solvents, foundry sand, plastic and rubber, packaging materials, demolition debris and a host of other useful materials.

In recycling, this province is setting a record. The program is rooted in a partnership consisting of environmentalists, industry, labor and municipal and provincial governments and we can all be very proud of what the blue box represents. It was a big step and did more than any other initiative to focus public attention on the waste issue.

I hope to build on these strengths and create conditions which favor continued success.

New priorities

Our goals, however, are far-reaching. A 25 per cent reduction in the amount of waste going into our disposal system by 1992 and a 50 per cent reduction by 2000 are minimums. As I have said before, we need a much more aggressive approach to waste reduction.

I cannot stress too often that we also need to set our priorities straight in the 3Rs, to put a greater emphasis on reduction, followed by reuse, with recycling in third place. It is time for us to go far beyond recycling, and to move quickly to further limit the amount of waste we generate.

We have to find ways of drastically reducing waste at source. We must learn to reuse things rather than throwing them away.

When we've gone as far as we can go on reduction and reuse, then and only then is recycling

should have only a small amount of residual waste left to go to our disposal system.

The action plan

Last February 21 I announced a new Waste Reduction Action Plan for Ontario. This plan lays out a course of action that should make it possible for us to meet those 25 and 50 per cent minimum targets on time.

- We will implement strong regulatory measures to reduce at source the flow of valuable resources now going to disposal;
- We will develop the necessary financial and technical systems to divert these materials from landfills and into productive use and reuse;
- We will help to create healthy markets for material recovered through 3Rs programs; and
- We will establish public education programs that will provide all members of Ontario society with the information they need to make responsible 3Rs choices to reduce waste.

Together, the provisions outlined in the plan demand more of everyone in Ontario, from individual householders to municipalities, retail establishments, large and small industrial plants and institutions.

We are strengthening our waste management resources. The new Waste Reduction Office is now developing and preparing to implement the programs and systems to make the Waste Reduction Action Plan really work.

We are prepared to deal effectively and swiftly with the mounting pressures created by our reliance on garbage disposal, especially in the Greater Toronto area, where immediate and decisive action is required.

The GTA initiative

The five regions which make up the Greater Toronto Area concentrate massive waste production in a relatively small area. This area represents the greatest challenge we face in waste reduction, but also provides one of our best testing grounds for developing and refining new solutions.

Last April, I announced that we would not permit the GTA to transport its waste outside the GTA. This was a difficult decision and, of course, one that was not met with universal enthusiasm. But it was the only decision I felt I could make with environmental integrity. We should not be sending garbage from one end of the province to another. I have not been persuaded that it would make either environmental or economic sense.

Instead, I have taken steps to establish a new authority, with the responsibility for finding new long-term landfill capacity for the GTA within the GTA where some 40 per cent of Ontario's solid waste is produced.

Until the authority and related legislation is in place, I have directed an interim staff team to initiate the process of finding longer term landfill capacity -- enough to last the GTA many years. I have directed the interim team to focus the search effort on finding three landfill sites, one in Peel, one in Durham and the third, within the boundaries of Metropolitan Toronto and York, to serve those two regions.

The process for evaluating alternative sites will be consistent with the improvements we are developing in the current consultations on the environmental assessment process. I think you will also find the process to be a more effective and less frustrating approach which deals

with realistic waste management options.

Some of the traditional pollution control techniques and waste management strategies are merely redistributing risks, either from one geographic area to another, or from the present time until some time in the future, rather than tackling problems and solving them at the source of generation.

Incineration

Incineration is one such traditional approach that takes high volumes of potentially reusable or recyclable materials and burns them to contaminate the air in local and downwind communities. Incineration is not only inconsistent with the 3Rs, it is a superficial solution which does not attack the root of the problem: We must waste less.

Incineration does not make waste disappear. Between one quarter and one third of the original weight of material entering the incinerator remains as bottom ash and fly ash, posing a threat to human health and the environment. This toxic residue still has to be put in a hole in the ground.

I have dealt with this redistribution of risk by banning all future municipal solid waste incinerators in Ontario. In addition, we have begun to review the Certificates of Approval, as well as the monitoring requirements, for the six incinerators either currently burning municipal solid waste or already approved for future operation. We will be tightening emission standards and ensuring that potentially recyclable and reusable materials do not go up in smoke.

No short cuts

We must turn away from the superficially easy answers and find solutions to our waste problems that will work in the long term. While we may have to allow a limited amount of

short term waste hauling, as we did, reluctantly, with Kingston and its surrounding townships, for long term solutions, we must find ways for each area to dispose of its own waste instead of sending it elsewhere. Each area, therefore, must take responsibility for its own 3Rs program.

I am convinced that we can find the answers to our waste problem in the 3Rs, with a major and increasing emphasis on reduction, so that we stop producing the mountains of garbage we are generating today.

Waste reduction is the key to success in changing a consumer society into one that conserves. There are principles which, I believe, are essential to the conserver society:

Conservation:

The first principle of a conserver society has to be conservation -- minimum use of materials and energy both in the goods and services supplied and in the packaging and systems that deliver them.

More efficient use of materials is effective in waste reduction -- reducing the weight and volume of products, containers and packaging. Our packaging industry, for example, has taken steps in this direction with lightweight cans and bottles. And the potential, for this and other industries, has barely been tapped.

Similarly, we can consider energy efficiency. There's no free ride for raw materials to the factory, for finished goods to the shops and our homes, or from our homes to a landfill site. Distance increases both costs and environmental consequences.

Durability:

Durability in goods can be a significant contributor to the conserver society. A

durable product outlasts its flimsy alternatives. The consumer cycle involves resource extraction, manufacturing, marketing, use and disposal. The cycle is broken, or at least extended significantly, when the product in use is maintained and repaired rather than thrown away. Less valuable material is discarded and the loss of employment in resource extraction is counterbalanced by continuing employment in a service industry.

True cost accounting:

The true costs involved in dealing with wastes must be assessed when decisions are made between reduction and disposal alternatives. Traditionally, tipping fees at landfills and other disposal costs do not take into account the real social and environmental costs involved. When the expenses of planning and siting a landfill, the damages that accrue to the community and the environment and the losses in material resources are factored in, we can see the real economic sense of waste reduction, reuse and recycling.

Accountability:

Accountability begins with individuals and the decisions we make. We recycle where we live, work and play. We compost at home. We influence the marketplace as well as reducing waste when we choose the reusable product over the disposable.

It continues when a business or industry takes stock of its systems and processes to eliminate waste in production, distribution and marketing, and to recycle and reuse paper and other materials being wasted internally. Accountability extends to the community -- municipality or region -- that adopts the conserver view. This includes effective recycling and composting programs. The concept also extends to dealing with materials within the community rather than discharging them as wastes beyond our borders. This principle is a major factor in our efforts to ensure that the Greater

Toronto Area closes the loop to contain these materials.

Product Stewardship

Product stewardship, the responsibility a manufacturer, brand owner or seller bears for the environmental impact of a product or container on the community, is another aspect of being accountable. This will be a significant factor as we deal with waste reduction, particularly in packaging areas.

In this vein, if products are manufactured with due regard for the integrity and future use of the materials that go into them, then we have a massive head start on reusing and recycling those materials.

Self interest:

Self-interest is also a factor and can be a positive one. When a community and its residents know the wastes they generate will remain with them, then self-interest can produce positive results in terms of buying decisions, waste reduction, product and container reuse and recycling effort. The prospects of ever-increasing disposal costs and environmental consequences to their immediate community are strong motivators.

Social involvement:

Accountability and self interest are forces in personal decision making that can and should be harnessed in community decisions. There must be ample opportunity for people, as individuals and groups, to get information and influence environmental decisions, such as waste sites, that can affect their interests.

This in turn improves the quality of government decisions by involving local expertise and arousing the self interest and accountability of the people who make up the

various levels of government.

Applying the principles

Putting these principles to work is both an opportunity and a challenge. Basically, we must stop being wasteful. The ideal, in a conserver society, is to replace waste management with resource management. There will always be some leftover wastes for which no immediate use can be found. They will be a continuing reminder and challenge to our enterprise and ingenuity.

But the more we manage a closed loop of materials for use and reuse, the closer we come to protecting our environmental and resource capital.

As we move in this direction, I think you will find that there are solid, practical advantages, to resource management planning over waste management planning. While we are still discussing various detail with municipalities and others, this is how I would like to see municipal resource management planning proceed:

Firstly, a municipality would be expected to develop a waste reduction action plan that takes full account of the 3Rs options that are available to provide maximum reduction. This should, of course, leave room for new 3Rs initiatives and opportunities for further waste elimination.

When this process is complete, the municipality, as a separate study, can begin identifying and evaluating landfill sites. At this stage, waste reduction plans are completed. I have, for solid environmental reasons, already eliminated incineration and transportation of wastes to outside communities. The improvements I expect to announce this year to the environmental assessment process could operate in a much more effective way in waste management, narrowing the potential areas of dispute and reducing substantially municipal frustration with the current costly process.

Creating a conserver society is not only a political or legislative issue. It is, rather, environmental, social, economic and even biological when you consider the consequences of resource depletion.

The challenge calls for environmental, social, economic and "people" solutions. Political and legislative authority must set the framework for solutions and then be prepared to reinforce, support and expedite action at all levels.

You will see some careful team building and thorough consultation on the part of our Waste Reduction Office as we start to travel the road to a conserver society.

We will be looking for ways to increase the effectiveness and the reach of the 3Rs. We will be measuring the barriers and prejudices impeding the use of secondary materials. We will search out the habits and processes that have been encouraging waste to see how they can be adapted to serve conservation -- to build a system that prefers used material over virgin resources, reuse of products rather than remanufacturing.

We will want advice and assistance in the challenge of re-educating an entire society to unlearn old habits and establish new behavior patterns.

We need help from you and from thousands of others, with the broad collective range of expertise you can offer, to produce results that are positive environmentally, socially and economically.



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